



EP committees press Italian Presidency on response to Ukraine crisis

Committees Committee on Foreign Affairs, Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Committee on International Trade [04-09-2014 - 17:47]

The EU's response to the crisis in Ukraine was in the spotlight at Parliament this week, following President Schulz's warning to EU leaders last Saturday of the dangers of escalation and his plea for a political solution to the crisis. He called on the EU to play a more ambitious international role and said it must give Ukraine the financial and political help needed to remain a unified and independent country.

His plea was echoed at the foreign affairs committee's first meeting of the new parliamentary term on Tuesday and Wednesday, when the committee chair, Elmar Brok, said red tape must be cut to speed up the delivery of crisis aid.

Humanitarian and reconstruction costs in Ukraine could amount to billions of euros, Peter Balas, head of the European Commission's Support Group for Ukraine, and Ertugul Apakan, the OSCE's chief monitor in Ukraine, told MEPs.

The foreign affairs committee pressed Federica Mogherini, the Italian foreign minister and the EU leaders' nominee to replace Catherine Ashton as the bloc's foreign policy chief, on Italy's approach to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. She said the Italian Presidency's key challenge in the next six months was to implement the association agreements with Ukraine, as well as Moldova and Georgia.

Following an agreement between President Schulz and President Poroshenko of Ukraine last Saturday, the committee is expected to back the association agreement on Monday, 7 September, under a fast-track procedure within Parliament. Mr Schulz will meet Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and President Poroshenko in Kiev next Thursday

The strategic partnership with Russia was now over, Ms Mogherini said, and she told MEPs that the Commission was preparing a new package of sanctions against Russia for adoption by member states this Friday. She also said the Russian gas pipeline project South Stream could help with EU energy diversification, even though it would increase EU dependence on Russia for energy.

Foreign policy takes precedence over trade policy when the EU's security is at stake, the Italian economic development minister, Carlo Calenda, said when the international trade committee asked him on Wednesday about trade links with Russia and Ukraine.

The plight of EU farmers hit by Russia's ban on imports of EU foodstuffs, including milk and dairy products, fruit and vegetables, in retaliation against EU sanctions on Russia, was raised by the agriculture committee on Wednesday. MEPs urged Italy's farm minister, Maurizio Martina, to do more to help. Mr Martina said the Italian Presidency would seek to expand the rapid response measures already taken, which would provide cash for stricken producers, and would explore ways of enabling the EU to cope better with such crises in future.

Press release

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